

INDIANAPOLIS RECORDER

NEWSPAPER

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The Indianapolis 552

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Published: Thursday, January 14, 2010 12:58 PM EST

For years, our African-American community, and the larger community as a whole, has been led to believe that a majority of Black students aren't graduating from Indiana's high schools; instead they dropout.

That's never been the truth and the 2009 Black graduation rates makes the lack of Black graduation a myth.

By any metric, the performance is impressive. Statewide, two-thirds (65.9 percent) of African-American high school students of the class of 2009 graduated on time with a diploma.

The performance in the Indianapolis area is equally impressive. Of African-American students of the class of 2009, in the 12 largest school districts with Black enrollment, the four-year Black graduation rate was 66.5 percent.

And if we count just the township and suburban districts, where the majority of Black students attend, the Black graduation rate is an even more impressive 77.2 percent!

The data showed some awesome results. Especially in Pike Township.

In terms of overall district enrollment, Pike has a higher Black enrollment (59.5 percent) versus IPS's 55.4 percent. But Pike's Black graduation rate was a stunning 85.6 percent, compared to IPS' anemic 49.3 percent. Pike's Black graduation rate rose from 72.0 percent in 2008, where's IPS dropped slightly from 50.1 percent.

Other Indianapolis area districts showed impressive Black graduation rate gains: Avon, 90.9 percent up from 69.4 percent; Hamilton Southeastern, 83.5 percent up from 77.8 percent; Decatur Township, a blistering 83.3 percent up from a low 58.7 percent.

Other districts' Black graduation rates: Lawrence Township, 79.7 percent from 72.4 percent; Washington Township, 79.1 percent up from 75.8 percent; Brownsburg, 78.8 percent from 74.1 percent; Perry Township, 71.4 percent from 68.9 percent; Warren Township, 67.3 percent from 60.9 percent; Wayne Township, 74.8 percent from 65.0 percent.

Another district with declining Black graduation rates was Franklin Township, 52.9 percent from 69.2 percent.

Then there's the disappointing graduation rates at two virtually all Black charter schools.

Fall Creek Academy, which is 93.6 percent Black, had an overall graduation rate of 44.4 percent in its first graduating class. But the school that shocked me was Charles Tindley, which is 96.9 percent Black, a school that routinely has its African-American students excelling on the annual ISTEP tests. But just Tindley's overall graduation rate was 60.0 percent; down from 63.2 percent.

One of the rationales of charter schools is supposed to be their smaller size, which enables more one-on-one attention. Yet, despite their small numbers of high school classes (18 for Fall Creek and 25 for Tindley) the graduation rates for these charters are disappointing.

So far I've talked about "graduation rates," the percent of students earning a diploma in four years. Most who hear a graduation rate assumes everyone else is a dropout. That's not the case; even among Black students.

Indiana law governs how graduation rates are calculated. Schools and districts report students' graduation

status in several groups: those graduating on time in four years; those still in school after four years; or those earning a GED, special education certificate of completion, or regular certificate of completion.

Any students not in any of those categories are considered "dropouts" under Indiana law.

So, though just 49.3 percent of IPS' Blacks graduated in 2009, that doesn't mean the other half dropped out. The facts are that 27.1 percent of IPS' class of 2009 were dropouts. Another 21.8 percent are still in school working on a diploma; only 1.8 percent of IPS' class of 2009 received either special education or regular certificates of completion or a GED.

Of the Blacks in the 12 largest school districts with Black enrollment, 15.5 percent were dropouts and another 15.2 percent were still in school.

The Black dropout rate was lowest in Avon (2.3 percent), Washington Township (4.3 percent), Wayne Township (4.5 percent), Pike (7.2 percent), Hamilton Southeastern (8.2 percent), and Decatur Township (8.3 percent).

Besides IPS, the Black dropout rate was highest in Franklin Township (20.6 percent); Warren Township (12.8 percent); Perry Township (10.4 percent), Lawrence Township (9.4 percent) and Brownsburg (9.1 percent).

The headline of this column is "The Indianapolis 552." That's the number of African-American students who dropped out of the class of 2009 in the Indianapolis area districts with the largest Black enrollments. While 2,371 Black students graduated, these 552 didn't.

It's those 552 that the Chamber of Commerce, school districts, churches and faith-based groups and youth agencies must concentrate on. Those 552 and another 646 students of other races/ethnicities from those same 12 districts who also dropped out of the class of 2009.

Until we find strategies of encouraging the Indianapolis 552 and the Indianapolis 646 to re-engage in education, we'll never achieve the goals for our youth we all want!

What I'm Hearing

in the Streets

After several years of heightened rates of murders in Indianapolis, overall homicides fell 13.8 percent in Indianapolis/Marion County in 2009, with just 106 homicides, down from 123 in 2008 and 124 in 2007.

However, the drop in African-American homicide victims was even more dramatic. Black homicides fell to 59 in 2009 from 80 in 2008 and 79 in 2007. The drop from 2008 to 2009 was a dramatic 26.3 percent

Perhaps it was aggressive law enforcement that did the trick. Or the effort by church-based and faith-based groups to convince the community that violence isn't an acceptable form of solving disputes. Perhaps it was just blind luck. But whatever happened, the drop was striking.

The question for our community for 2010 will be whether the decline will remain.

Regardless of what happens Saturday night, the Indianapolis Colts, under rookie Head Coach Jim Caldwell, have had a great season. While Peyton Manning deserves MVP kudos, our community needs to honor what Coach Caldwell has done, winning the most games of any rookie head coach in NFL history.

I was privileged to finally meet Coach Caldwell last Saturday morning at a breakfast where the 100 Black Men of Indianapolis introduced nearly 50 young Black young men in their 2010 Beutillion Militaire program.

Coach Caldwell spoke to these young Black men with his quiet confidence and competence, his strong faith and humanity coming through. I saw how Caldwell was able to step into Tony Dungy's huge shoes and mold our Colts to excellence. Good luck to Coach Caldwell and all the Colts in the playoffs.

See 'ya next week!

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